

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

18 January 2006

WINCHESTER BUSINESS HUB

REPORT OF CITY CENTRE MANAGER

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

1. There is currently a wide range of support services for business in Winchester, but these are confusing for businesses to navigate.
2. There is an opportunity to align these support services to make accessibility easier for Winchester businesses, and to facilitate closer working between key economic partners.
3. The Business Hub will provide a physical presence, and a central point of contact for businesses, where they can receive information, advice & guidance or be quickly referred to the correct business support organisation.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Town Forum consider whether to request Cabinet to approve in principle the contribution of £5,000 from the Town Account to establish a Business Hub in Winchester town.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, Winchester City Centre Partnership, North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Business Link Wessex, The University of Winchester, the Learning and Skills Council and other partners, have established links with the private sector both in Winchester and throughout the district.
- 1.2 Although there is a wide variety of support available for businesses, it can seem unco-ordinated and confusing for businesses. Despite the availability and increased depth of information available on the Internet, there remains a demand for a physical location for information, advice and guidance and 'signposting' businesses to the correct support organisation.

2 Current Situation

- 2.1 Winchester is working towards Business Improvement District (BID) status. This project aims to provide sustainable private sector funding for businesses to spend as they see fit to improve their local area.
- 2.2 A Winchester Vision document is in draft, prepared by the Council for distribution to partners and the private sector. This will set out the Council's future vision for Winchester town, including provision for businesses.
- 2.3 The Winchester Economic Action Plan is in draft and currently being consulted on. This seeks to engage economic development partners at a strategic, district wide level. It provides a direct communication link between partners and the business community at a strategic level. It includes an action plan for partners to work together to achieve, including establishing the necessary business support infrastructure a Business Hub would provide.
- 2.4 There is currently potential for confusion amongst the business community, 'the customer', about which partner delivers which service. Partners have traditionally operated alone, with little or no integration with other organisations at operational level. Working in partnership can not only bring economies of scale, but avoid duplication, and can often bring more creative solutions to common problems. There is a need for integration of partners and joined up delivery of economic provision to the customer – indeed business locally is lobbying for this (see Appendix letter to Hampshire Chronicle).

3 Future Provision

- 3.1 A vision of one portal for information, advice and guidance and business services helps to focus public & private sector support for Winchester based businesses, improving the take up of services on offer. This could include the following;
- Signposting to the plethora of services available to businesses Winchester City Council – business rates, waste management, environmental health, economic development, commercial property register etc.
 - Winchester City Centre Partnership - projects to support city based businesses
 - North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry – training, advice and networking
 - Enterprise Agency – support for start up businesses up to 18 months old
 - Business Link Wessex – central agency offering business support and advice services
- 3.2 Visible integration of these services ensures that the customers' needs are put first. Access to service provision providing the right service at the right time and in one place is key to customer focused service delivery.

4 Opportunity

- 4.1 Opportunity exists for Winchester City Council and partners to join forces in a visible way creating a physical business hub with the co-location of economic service provision. This would provide not only a physical centre for business support activities in Winchester, but would allow the pooling of ideas and resources towards common goals, and allow greater networking and understanding between partners.
- 4.2 A business hub providing both direct and indirect services to the private sector will break down barriers for integrated service delivery and provide a physical presence for the business community to understand. In short, closer working between partners will allow for more efficient and effective working practices.
- 4.3 The development of integrated service provision paves the way for future development of BIDs in the town centre. The Business Hub will provide a central location in Winchester town for local businesses and entrepreneurs to go to, where they will be welcomed and offered help in their enterprise.
- 4.4 Services could include:
- Meeting space, Internet access and information point
 - Business clinics
 - Training facility providing access to lifelong learning, information, advice and guidance working with Higher and Further Education, IT facilities
 - Co-location of officers from North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry and City Centre Partnership with drop in access by the customer
 - Project collaboration between all partners at operational level
 - Hot desk facilities for migrant partners i.e. Business Link, Enterprise Agency, Hampshire Broadband and 'travelling' business people.
 - The opportunity to act as pre start space and support for creative and emerging industries and start ups
 - The physical hub should be augmented by spin out services by partners linking to wider, established service provision like business clubs, export advice, business

support services and virtual support such as online and telephone information services.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The developing economic action plan for Winchester District should be underpinned through operational project delivery; in order for the document to achieve its aim of being an outcome focussed guidance tool, rather than a dormitory plan.
- 5.2 Integration of service delivery across partners improves internal and external communications, and will provide practical business support, which the customer can understand. The development of a business hub is key to joined up service provision to protect and enhance the Winchester economy
- 5.3 Funding is required in the first instance to set up the Business Hub. Funding contributions are currently in negotiation with Winchester City Council. A growth bid of £50,000 has been made for the Economic Development budget, but has not yet been formally approved. Officers recommend £10,000 from this budget be allocated to the Business Hub project (subject to approval). Negotiations are also taking place with Hampshire County Council, and the University of Winchester. £9000 will be jointly provided by Winchester City Centre Partnership and the North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry, but there is a shortfall in terms of funding which needs to be met by partners. £5,000 is requested from Winchester Town Forum as a contribution to this shortfall. Town Forum will want to consider the request and may wish to approve in principle, subject to seeing a full business plan.
- 5.4 Future sustainable funding can be achieved through the successful development of BIDs, in kind and cash contributions from Local Authorities and the development of a nominal charge for use of meeting, IT and hot desk facilities where appropriate.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

6 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 6.1 Winchester City Centre Partnership, North Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other partners as above, are key partners of Winchester City Council, and reflect the Aims and Values determined in the Council's Corporate Strategy.
- 6.2 The Business Hub project contributes to the Council's objective of Economic Prosperity; "to achieve a strong and diverse urban and rural economy which builds on local strengths and offers opportunities for all".

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 £5,000 is requested as a contribution to the Business Hub work.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Examples of best practice can be found at:

<http://www.ibh.org.uk> Islington Business Hub

<http://www.hailshamtrust.co.uk> Hailsham Trust

<http://www.havant.gov.uk/havant-2275> Broadmarsh Regional Business Centre

APPENDIX: Hampshire Chronicle letter, 29th December 2005, – "To Thrive, we need a business hub as a key point of contact"